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## DEPARTMENT OF INSPECTIONS, LICENSES & PERMITS

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*Robert J. Frances, P.E. Acting Director*

**To:** Building, Plumbing, and Fire Protection Contractors, Architects and Engineers

**From:** Robert J. Frances, P.E., Acting Director Department of Inspections Licenses and Permits

**Subject:** Changes to the Howard County Building Code

**Date:** June 1, 2007

Howard County has adopted the 2006 International Building Code (IBC), International Residential Code (IRC), and the National Standard Plumbing Code Illustrated (NSPCI). In reviewing the codes we found some changes that are significant enough that we are going to phase in the requirements over time.

### **Residential Walk-Through Plans**

Howard County is going to continue the residential walk thru process on Wednesday and Thursday's from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm. We are making a modification that applies to additions less than 600 square feet. **Beginning August 1, 2007** we are now going to require nominal plans for all additions less than 600 square feet. This is to insure that a basic understanding of the planned framing concept is provided to show the wall bracing to be installed. This will assist the inspector in the field so he/she has a plan to inspect against that clearly shows the wall bracing for that particular addition. Below is more information about the wall bracing requirement.

### **Wall Bracing**

*All new construction is required to meet section R-602.10 for wall bracing, and if the length of a wall bracing panel is less than forty-eight (48") inches, Section R-602.10.5 shall be used. This section states that the walls shall be sheathed in continuous wood structural panel sheathing. The minimum length for the braced wall panel based on the size (height) of the opening shall be as listed below:*

#### **LENGTH REQUIREMENTS FOR BRACED WALL PANELS IN A CONTINUOUSLY SHEATHED WALL**

MINIMUM LENGTH OF BRACED WALL PANEL (inches)			MAXIMUM OPENING HEIGHT NEXT TO THE BRACED WALL PANEL (% of wall height)
8-foot wall	9-foot wall	10-foot wall	
48	54	60	100
32	36	40	85
24	27	30	65

*If the braced wall panel is less than that listed above, alternative braced wall methods must be used in accordance with Section R602.10.6 of the IRC (i.e. portal frames, hold down devices or tie down straps). If the alternative braced wall method is being used, an inspection prior to the installation of exterior wall weatherproofing (i.e. house wraps, siding, etc.) is required.*

*Regardless of the method being used above, if wall bracing panels are less than forty-eight (48") inches in length, site specific plans showing the specific location, length, and nailing methods of the wall braced panel and any specialized equipment/hardware, etc. will be required. Such detailed plans shall always be required, even if utilizing method number 3 for walls with large openings (i.e. sunrooms, morning rooms and garage openings).*

### **New Residential Window Requirements**

Beginning **August 1, 2007**, we will begin strict enforcement of the window sill height requirement that is now outlined in the 2006 International Residential Code. Below you will find the new requirements for window sill heights on egress windows in bedrooms:

*All bedrooms are required to have a direct means of escape from the bedroom to the outside. This escape can be by a means of emergency escape and rescue egress window, which meets Section R-310 of the IRC for size and area. The new IRC has additional requirements for windows under Section R613.2, and this is for all windows in the proposed dwelling, regardless of their location. This new requirement states the following: If the outside grade to the window is more than seventy-two (72") inches below the window and the inside window sill height is twenty-four (24") inches or less to the floor, the window is to be restricted to only allow an opening size of four (4") inches (so as a 4" ball will not pass through it). [So that the emergency escape and rescue window will function with full open sizes, **no** bedroom rescue egress window sill height less than twenty-four (24") inches to the floor will be permitted, **unless an approved window guard** that complies with ASTM F 2090 is installed.]*

### **Howard County Plumbing Code**

Howard County will now require all incoming fire sprinkler lines with a fire department connection to be equipped with a reduced pressure zone backflow preventor (RPZ). Any incoming sprinkler line that does not have a fire department connection will still be allowed to use a double detector check backflow preventor. An RPZ will now be required on all sprinkler systems that have a Fire Department Connection installed in the county and are connected to a potable water supply.

The requirements for the installation of RPZ's to be installed will become effective on all sprinkler systems submitted for approval on or after **September 1, 2007**. We understand that this is a major change to the current practices and may affect current projects already in process so we have allowed time to phase in this new requirement. The backflow preventor will still be required to have a metered bypass on the backflow preventor and this line must also be protected with a RPZ.

We will also take in to consideration situations that may require installing a fire pump to compensate for the significant increase in pressure loss imposed by a RPZ. If you are forced to add a fire pump because of the RPZ, but would be able to meet your sprinkler design with a double check backflow preventor, you must submit a letter stating your situation and request an allowance to use a double check backflow preventor. This request will be handled on a case by case basis. Not all requests will be able to be granted based upon location and the specifics of the system involved.

#### **Commercial Expedited Review**

Howard County will begin, in the fall, an expedited plan review for small commercial interior alterations. This process will allow small interiors to be reviewed in a faster process so that construction can proceed in a timely manner. The details of this process will be distributed soon.

If you have any questions concerning the above policies and code changes, please contact Donald Mock, P.E., Acting Chief of the Plan Review Division at 410-313-3948.

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